



NEWS

from the National Wildlife Refuge System

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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE INVITES PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN FULFILLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT ACT

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service formally extended an invitation to the public to participate in development of key policies called for in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, a comprehensive "organic law" governing management of the world's largest and most diverse network of lands and waters devoted specifically to wildlife.

Referring to a notice published in the January 23 *Federal Register*, Fish and Wildlife Service Director Jamie Rappaport Clark said, "We're advising our conservation partners and interested constituents that we are developing key policies to implement the Refuge System Improvement Act and welcome their involvement as we do so."

Policies developed as a result of the organic law are intended to improve management of the 92-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which has been plagued by increasing and sometimes conflicting public use demands. Last year, Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt led a bipartisan group of Congressmen and leaders of sportsmen's and environmental organizations in the development of legislation to address these issues, which was signed by President Clinton on October 9, 1997.

Refuge System policies to be addressed include biological integrity, management of public uses, determining compatibility, and development of comprehensive conservation plans for refuges. The Service estimates that draft policies will be available for public review and comment beginning in May 1998.

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The draft policies also will be available on the National Wildlife Refuge System web site (refuges.fws.gov) during the public review and comment period.

Requests to receive copies of the specific draft policies as they are prepared should be sent via mail to: Refuge Improvement Act Project, Attention: Ken Edwards, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Refuges, 4401 North Fairfax Drive, Room 670, Arlington, Virginia, 22203. Requests may also be made via fax at 703-358-2248 or email at: Refuge_Improvement_Act@fws.gov. Each request should include a complete mailing address to which the draft policies will be sent.

Begun in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt, the National Wildlife Refuge System now includes more than 500 refuges and extends throughout all 50 states and U.S. territories. Hundreds of refuges are strategically located along the major migratory bird "flyways," and dozens were established to protect critically endangered species. National wildlife refuges teem with plants and animals of every variety, from mallard to moose, walleye pike to whooping crane, cactus to caribou.

Nearly 30 million people annually visit national wildlife refuges for activities like birdwatching and other wildlife observation, hiking, fishing, hunting, nature photography, and environmental education. At least one national wildlife refuge is located within an hour's drive of virtually every major city in the United States.

For more information on the National Wildlife Refuge System, call 1-800-344-WILD, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's homepage at www.fws.gov and click on "National Wildlife Refuge System," or better yet, visit a national wildlife refuge.